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Pope Benedict XVI

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January 1, 2008 to January 30, 2008



Benedict XVI's Homily on the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God and the forty-first World Day of Peace delivered in St. Peter's Basilica on January 1, 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today, we are beginning a new year and Christian hope takes us by the hand; let us begin it by invoking divine Blessings upon it and imploring, through the intercession of Mary, Mother of God, the gift of peace: for our families, for our cities, for the whole world. With this hope, I greet all of you present here, starting with the distinguished Ambassadors of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See who have gathered at this celebration on the occasion of the World Day of Peace.

Our thoughts now turn spontaneously to Our Lady, whom we invoke today as the Mother of God. It was Pope Paul VI who moved to 1 January the Feast of the Divine Motherhood of Mary, which was formerly celebrated on 11 October. Indeed, even before the liturgical reform that followed the Second Vatican Council, the memorial of the circumcision of Jesus on the eighth day after his birth -- as a sign of submission to the law, his official insertion in the Chosen People -- used to be celebrated on the first day of the year and the Feast of the Name of Jesus was celebrated the following Sunday. We perceive a few traces of these celebrations in the Gospel passage that has just been proclaimed, in which St Luke says that eight days after his birth the Child was circumcised and was given the name "Jesus", "the name given by the Angel before he was conceived in [his Mother's] ... womb" (Luke 2:21). Today's feast, therefore, as well as being a particularly significant Marian feast, also preserves a strongly Christological content because, we might say, before the Mother, it concerns the Son, Jesus, true God and true Man.

Mary's immense privilege

The Apostle Paul refers to the mystery of the divine motherhood of Mary, the "Theotokos," in his Letter to the Galatians. "When the time had fully come," he writes, "God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law" (4:4). We find the mystery of the Incarnation of the Divine Word and the Divine Motherhood of Mary summed up in a few words: the Virgin's great privilege is precisely to be Mother of the Son who is God. The most logical and proper place for this Marian feast is therefore eight days after Christmas. Indeed, in the night of Bethlehem, when "she gave

birth to her first-born son" (Luke 2:7), the prophecies concerning the Messiah were fulfilled. "The virgin shall be with child and bear a son," Isaiah had foretold (7:14); "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son", the Angel Gabriel said to Mary (Luke 1:31); and again, an Angel of the Lord, the Evangelist Matthew recounts, appeared to Joseph in a dream to reassure him and said: "Do not fear to take Mary for your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son" (Matthew 1:20-21).

The title "Mother of God," together with the title "Blessed Virgin," is the oldest on which all the other titles with which Our Lady was venerated are based, and it continues to be invoked from generation to generation in the East and in the West. A multitude of hymns and a wealth of prayers of the Christian tradition refer to the mystery of her divine motherhood, such as, for example, a Marian antiphon of the Christmas season, "Alma Redemptoris Mater," with which we pray in these words: "Tu quae genuisti, natura mirante, tuum sanctum Genitorem, Virgo prius ac posterius -- You, in the wonder of all creation, have brought forth your Creator, Mother ever virgin". Dear brothers and sisters, let us today contemplate Mary, ever-virgin Mother of the Only-Begotten Son of the Father; let us learn from her to welcome the Child who was born for us in Bethlehem. If we recognize in the Child born of her the Eternal Son of God and accept him as our one Saviour, we can be called and we really are children of God: sons in the Son. The Apostle writes: "God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4).

Same but different Child

The Evangelist Luke repeats several times that Our Lady meditated silently on these extraordinary events in which God had involved her. We also heard this in the short Gospel passage that the Liturgy presents to us today. "Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). The Greek verb used, "sumballousa," literally means "piecing together" and makes us think of a great mystery to be discovered little by little. Although the Child lying in a manger looks like all children in the world, at the same time he is totally different: he is the Son of God, he is God, true God and true man. This mystery -- the Incarnation of the Word and the divine Motherhood of Mary -- is great and certainly far from easy to understand with the human mind alone. Yet, by learning from Mary, we can understand with our hearts what our eyes and minds do not manage to perceive or contain on their own. Indeed, this is such a great gift that only through faith are we granted to accept it, while not entirely understanding it.

And it is precisely on this journey of faith that Mary comes to meet us as our support and guide. She is mother because she brought forth Jesus in the flesh; she is mother because she adhered totally to the Father's will. St Augustine wrote: "The divine motherhood would have been of no value to her had Christ not borne her in his heart, with a destiny more fortunate than the moment when she conceived him in the flesh" ("De Sancta Virginitate," 3, 3). And in her heart Mary continued to treasure, to "piece together" the subsequent events of which she was to be a witness and protagonist, even to the death on the Cross and the Resurrection of her Son Jesus.

Dear brothers and sisters, it is only by pondering in the heart, in other words, by piecing together and finding unity in all we experience, that, following Mary, we can penetrate the mystery of a God who was made man out of love and who calls us to follow him on the path of love; a love to be expressed daily by generous service to the brethren.

... May the fragile Child whom today the Virgin shows to the world make us peacemakers, witnesses of him, the Prince of Peace. Amen!

The Virgin Truly Became Mother of God – Angelus Address, January 1, 2008

... We have begun a new year and I wish that it will be for all peaceful and prosperous. I commend it to the heavenly protection of the Virgin, whom the liturgy invokes today with the most important title, the Mother of God. With her "yes" to the angel, on the day of the Annunciation, the Virgin conceived in her womb through the Holy Spirit, the eternal Word, and she brought him forth on the night of the Nativity.

In Bethlehem, in the fullness of time, Jesus was born of Mary: The Son of God was made man for our salvation, and the Virgin truly became Mother of God. This immense gift that Mary received was not reserved only for her, but for us all. In her fruitful virginity, in fact, God gave "to men the benefits of eternal salvation ... because through her we received the author of life" (cf. collect prayer). Mary, after having given mortal flesh to the only Son of God, became mother of believers and of all humankind.

It is in the name of Mary, Mother of God and of mankind that for the past forty years, on the first day of the year, the Church has celebrated the World Day for Peace. ... May Mary, Mother of the Prince of Peace,

aid the Church in its untiring service for peace, and help the community of nations, that will celebrate in 2008 the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to begin on a path of authentic solidarity and of stable peace.

[In English, the pope said:]

I greet all the English-speaking visitors gathered for this Angelus prayer on New Year's Day. On this, the Octave of Christmas, the Church honors Mary, the ever-virgin Mother of God, whose complete openness to God's saving plan bore fruit in the birth of the Prince of Peace. May the peace proclaimed by the angels at Bethlehem take ever deeper root in men's hearts, and inspire the whole human family to live in harmony, justice and fraternal solidarity.

This Woman Is Very Close to Us and Helps Us – General Audience on January 2, 2008

... Yesterday we celebrated the solemn feast of Mary, Mother of God. "Mother of God," "Theotokos," is the title officially attributed to Mary in the fifth century, exactly by the Council of Ephesus in 431, but affirmed in the devotion of the Christian people already since the third century, in the context of the discussions that arose in that period over the person of Christ. It is underscored with that title that Christ is God and he is truly born as man from Mary: thus his unity as true God and true man was preserved. In truth, although the debate seemed to focus on Mary, it essentially regarded the Son. Wanting to safeguard the humanity of Christ, some fathers suggested a more attenuated term: Instead of the title "Theotokos," they proposed that of "Christotokos," "Mother of Christ": Rightly, however, that was seen as a threat to the doctrine of the complete unity of the divinity with the humanity of Christ. For this reason, after ample discussion in the Council of Ephesus of 431, there was solemnly affirmed on one hand, the unity of the two natures, the divine and the human, in the person of the Son of God (cf. DS, No. 250) and, on the other hand, the legitimacy of the attribution to the Virgin the title of "Theotokos," Mother of God (DS, No. 251).

After this council there is recorded a true explosion of marian devotion and numerous churches were constructed that were dedicated to the Mother of God. Among these, there stands out with primacy the Basilica of Saint Mary Major here in Rome. The doctrine concerning Mary, Mother of God, found further confirmation in the Council of Chalcedon in 451 in which Christ was declared "true God and true man [...] born for us and for our salvation from Mary, Virgin and Mother of God, in his humanity" (DS, No. 301). As is known, the Second Vatican Council gathered up the doctrine on Mary in Chapter 8 of the dogmatic constitution on the Church, "Lumen Gentium," reaffirming her divine maternity. The chapter is entitled: "The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church."

The title Mother of God, which is so profoundly linked to the Christmas celebrations, is for this reason the fundamental appellation with which the community of believers has, we might say, always honored the Holy Virgin. It expresses very well Mary's mission in the history of salvation. All of the other titles attributed to the Madonna find their basis in her vocation to be the Mother of the Redeemer, the human creature elected by God to realize the plan of salvation, centered on the great mystery of the incarnation of the divine Word. In these festive days we have paused to contemplate the representation of the Nativity in the crèche. At the center of this scene we find the Virgin Mother who offers the child Jesus to the contemplation of those who come to adore the Savior: the shepherds, the poor folk of Bethlehem, the magi who have come from the East.

Later, on the feast of the Presentation of the Lord, which we celebrate on February 2, it will be the elderly Simeon and the prophetess Anna to receive into their arms from the Mother the little Child to adore him. The devotion of the Christian people has always considered the birth of Jesus and the divine maternity of Mary as two aspects of the same mystery of the incarnation of the divine Word and for this reason never considered the Nativity as something of the past. We are "contemporaries" of the shepherds, of the magi, of Simeon and Anna, and while we go with them we are full with joy, because God has desired to be the God with us and he has a mother, who is our mother.

From the title "Mother of God" are drawn all the other titles with which the Church honors Mary, but this one is the fundamental title. We think of the privilege of the "Immaculate Conception," of being, that is, immune from sin from the moment of her conception: Mary was preserved from every stain of sin because she had to be the Mother of the Redeemer. The same goes for the title "Assumed": she who gave birth to the Savior could not be subjected to the corruption that comes from original sin. And we know that all these privileges are not given to distance Mary from us, but on the contrary to make her more near; in fact, being totally with God, this Woman is very close to us and helps us as mother and sister. Even the unique and unrepeatable place that Mary has in the community of believers derives from this fundamental vocation of

being the Mother of the Redeemer. Precisely as such, Mary is also the Mother of the Mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church. Justly, then, during the Second Vatican Council, on November 21, 1964, Paul VI solemnly attributed to Mary the title of "Mother of the Church."

Precisely because Mother of the Church, the Virgin is also Mother of each one of us, who are members of the Mystical Body of Christ. From the cross Jesus entrusted the Mother to each of his disciples and, at the same time, entrusted each of his disciples to the love his Mother. The evangelist John concludes his brief and suggestive account with the words: "And from that moment the disciple took her into his house" (John 19:27). That is how the Greek text is translated in Italian. The Greek says "eis tai dia," he welcomed her into his own reality, into his being. In this way she is part of his life and the two lives interpenetrate; and this welcoming her ("eis tai dia") in his own life is the testament of the Lord. Thus, in the supreme moment of the fulfillment of his messianic mission, Jesus leaves to each of his disciples, as a precious inheritance, his own Mother, the Virgin Mary.

Dear brothers and sisters, in these first days of the year we are invited to attentively consider the importance of the presence of Mary in the life of the Church and in our personal existence. Let us entrust ourselves to her that she may guide our steps in the his new period of time that the Lord has given to us to live, and that she may help us to be authentic friends of her Son and thus courageous builders of the his Kingdom in this world, Kingdom of light and of truth. Happy New Year to all! This is the greeting that I desire to address to you here present and to your loved ones in this first general audience of 2008. May the new year, begun under the sign of the Virgin Mary, make us feel her maternal presence with more vivacity, so that, sustained and comforted by the protection of the Virgin, we can contemplate the countenance of her Son Jesus with renewed eyes and walk in the paths of the good with greater vigor.

At the end of the audience, Benedict XVI greeted pilgrims in several languages. In Italian, he said:

Following the example of Mary, may you know how to bear, meditate and follow the Word that became flesh in Bethlehem and spread the message of salvation with enthusiasm.

In English, he said:

Yesterday, the Church joyfully celebrated the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. This ancient title of Our Lady – Theotókos – reflects the truth that Jesus, her Son, is true God and true man. The confirmation of this title at the Council of Ephesus in the fifth century led to ever greater devotion to Mary and the dedication of numerous churches in her honor, including the Basilica of Saint Mary Major here in Rome. During this Christmas season, we can sense the close relationship between the Incarnation and our Lady's dignity as the Mother of God. Indeed, the title "Mother of God" expresses Mary's special mission in the history of salvation and her particular role in the mystery of Christ and the Church. Our Lady's divine motherhood is in fact the basis of every other title by which the Church honors her. Mother of God and Mother of the Church, Mary was also entrusted by Christ to be the Mother of each of his disciples (cf. Jn 19:27). In this New Year, may we turn to her with confidence and, through her protection and prayers, be strengthened in our love for Jesus her Son and our service to the coming of his Kingdom.

Papal Address to Gift of Mary House run by the Missionaries of Charity in the Vatican – January 4, 2008

I greet with affection those of you present here together with those in the other rooms of this house, which is called "Gift of Mary," who are watching us and are joining in by means of television link-up. ...

To experience the Virgin's love

When this house was founded, Blessed Mother Teresa desired to call it "Gift of Mary," hoping, as it were, that it might always be possible to experience in it the love of the Blessed Virgin. For anyone who knocks at the door, it is in fact a gift of Mary to feel welcomed by the loving arms of the sisters and volunteers. The presence of those who are ready to listen to people in difficulty and serve them with that very attitude which impelled Mary to go straightaway to St. Elizabeth is another gift of Mary. ... I invoke the motherly protection of Mary, Mother of Christ and our Mother, I affectionately impart my blessing to you all.

... At the beginning of the New Year, the beautiful name of this house, "Gift of Mary," invites us to make a tireless gift of our lives. May the Virgin Mary, who offered the whole of herself to the Almighty and was filled with every grace and blessing with the coming of the Son of God, teach us to make our existence a daily gift to God the Father at the service of our brethren as we listen to his Word and his will.

On the Epiphany – Angelus Address, January 6, 2008

... Together with the Christian communities of the East, very devoted to the Holy Mother of God, we invoke Mary's protection of the universal Church, so that the Gospel of Christ spread throughout the whole world, "Lumen Gentium," light of all peoples. ...

Evangelization Demands a Total and Faithful Adhesion to the Word of God - Letter to Jesuits' thirty-fifth General Congregation dated January 10, 2008

... I entrust the General Congregation and the entire Society of Jesus to the intercession of your holy founder and the saints of your Order, and to the maternal protection of Mary, so that every spiritual son of St. Ignatius might be able to keep before his eyes "first of all God and then the nature of this his institute" ("Formula Instituti," 1).

Papal Homily on Feast of Christ's Baptism – January 13, 2008

... May the Virgin Mary in particular accompany both them and you, dear parents, now and forever. Amen!

On Christ's Baptism – Angelus Address, January 13, 2008

... Christ's whole mission is summarized in this: We are baptized in the Holy Spirit to be liberated from the slavery of death and "have the heavens opened to us," that is, have access to the true and full life, which will be "a plunging ever anew into the vastness of being, in which we are simply overwhelmed with joy" ("Spe Salvi," No. 12). This is also what happened for the thirteen babies to whom I administered the sacrament of baptism this morning in the Sistine Chapel. For them and for their families we invoke the maternal protection of Mary Most Holy. And we pray for all Christians, that they may understand more and more the gift of baptism and commit themselves to living it with consistency, witnessing to the love of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

After the Angelus, the Holy Father said the following:

... Dear young migrants! Commit yourselves together with your contemporaries to building a more just and fraternal society, fulfilling your duties, respecting the laws and not allowing yourselves to be caught up in violence. I entrust all of you to Mary, Mother of all humanity.

Mary Suffers With Those Who Are in Affliction - Papal Message for World Day of the Sick, January 11, 2008

1. On February 11, the memorial of the Blessed Mary Virgin of Lourdes, the World Day of the Sick will be celebrated, a propitious occasion to reflect on the meaning of pain and the Christian duty to take responsibility for it in whatever situation it arises. This year this significant day is connected to two important events for the life of the Church, as one already understands from the theme chosen 'The Eucharist, Lourdes and Pastoral Care for the Sick': the 150th anniversary of the apparitions of the Immaculate Mary at Lourdes, and the celebration of the International Eucharistic Congress at Quebec in Canada. In this way, a remarkable opportunity to consider the close connection that exists between the Mystery of the Eucharist, the role of Mary in the project of salvation, and the reality of human pain and suffering, is offered to us.

The 150 years since the apparitions of Lourdes invite us to turn our gaze towards the Holy Virgin, whose Immaculate Conception constitutes the sublime and freely-given gift of God to a woman so that she could fully adhere to divine designs with a steady and unshakable faith, despite the tribulations and the sufferings that she would have to face. For this reason, Mary is a model of total self-abandonment to the will of God: she received in her heart the eternal Word and she conceived it in her virginal womb; she trusted to God and, with her soul pierced by a sword (cf. Lk 2:35), she did not hesitate to share the passion of her Son, renewing on Calvary at the foot of the Cross her 'Yes' of the Annunciation. To reflect upon the Immaculate Conception of Mary is thus to allow oneself to be attracted by the 'Yes' which joined her wonderfully to the mission of Christ, the redeemer of humanity; it is to allow oneself to be taken and led by her hand to pronounce in one's turn 'fiat' to the will of God, with all one's existence interwoven with joys and sadness, hopes and disappointments, in the awareness that tribulations, pain and suffering make rich the meaning of our pilgrimage on the earth.

2. One cannot contemplate Mary without being attracted by Christ and one cannot look at Christ without

immediately perceiving the presence of Mary. There is an indissoluble link between the Mother and the Son, generated in her womb by work of the Holy Spirit, and this link we perceive, in a mysterious way, in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, as the Fathers of the Church and theologians pointed out from the early centuries onwards. 'The flesh born of Mary, coming from the Holy Spirit, is bread descended from heaven', observed St. Hilary of Poitiers. In the "Bergomensium Sacramentary" of the ninth century we read: 'Her womb made flower a fruit, a bread that has filled us with an angelic gift. Mary restored to salvation what Eve had destroyed by her sin.' And St. Pier Damiani observed: 'That body that the most blessed Virgin generated, nourished in her womb with maternal care, that body I say, without doubt and no other, we now receive from the sacred altar, and we drink its blood as a sacrament of our redemption. This is what the Catholic faith believes, this the holy Church faithfully teaches'. The link of the Holy Virgin with the Son, the sacrificed Lamb who takes away the sins of the world, is extended to the Church, the mystic Body of Christ. Mary, observes the Servant of God John Paul II, is a 'woman of the Eucharist' in her whole life, as a result of which the Church, seeing Mary as her model, 'is also called to imitate her in her relationship with this most holy mystery' (Encyclical "Ecclesia de Eucharistia," n. 53). In this perspective one understands even further why in Lourdes the cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary is joined to a strong and constant reference to the Eucharist with daily Celebrations of the Eucharist, with adoration of the Most Holy Sacrament, and with the blessing of the sick, which constitutes one of the strongest moments of the visit of pilgrims to the grotto of Massabielle.

The presence of many sick pilgrims in Lourdes, and of the volunteers who accompany them, helps us to reflect on the maternal and tender care that the Virgin expresses towards human pain and suffering. Associated with the Sacrifice of Christ, Mary, Mater Dolorosa, who at the foot of the Cross suffers with her divine Son, is felt to be especially near by the Christian community, which gathers around its suffering members, who bear the signs of the passion of the Lord. Mary suffers with those who are in affliction, with them she hopes, and she is their comfort, supporting them with her maternal help. And is it not perhaps true that the spiritual experience of very many sick people leads us to understand increasingly that 'the Divine Redeemer wishes to penetrate the soul of every sufferer through the heart of his holy Mother, the first and the most exalted of all the redeemed'? (John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, "Salvifici doloris," n. 26).

3. If Lourdes leads us to reflect upon the maternal love of the Immaculate Virgin for her sick and suffering children, the next International Eucharistic Congress will be an opportunity to worship Jesus Christ present in the Sacrament of the altar, to entrust ourselves to him as Hope that does not disappoint, to receive him as that medicine of immortality which heals the body and the spirit. ...

5. While I extend my cordial greetings to all sick people and to all those who take care of them in various ways, I invite the diocesan and parish communities to celebrate the next World Day of the Sick by appreciating to the full the happy coinciding of the 150th anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady at Lourdes with the International Eucharistic Congress. ...

May the next World Day of the Sick be, in addition, a propitious circumstance to invoke in a special way the maternal protection of Mary over those who are weighed down by illness; health-care workers; and workers in pastoral care in health! ... I entrust all to Mary, the Mother of God and our Mother, the Immaculate Conception. May she help everyone in testifying that the only valid response to human pain and suffering is Christ, who in resurrecting defeated death and gave us the life that knows no end. With these feelings, from my heart I impart to everyone my special Apostolic Blessing.

On Christian Unity – General Audience, January 23, 2008

... May the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, make it possible for all the disciples of her divine Son to live in peace and reciprocal charity, as a true example before the whole world, and make the face of God accessible in the face of Christ, who is God-with-us, God of peace and unity.

On the Good News – January 27, 2008

... Let us pray to Mary Most Holy that she obtain for the Church the same passion for the kingdom of God that animated the mission of Jesus Christ: passion for God, for his lordship of life and of love; passion for man, encountered in truth to give him the most precious treasure; the love of God, his Creator and Father.

Benedict XVI's Message for Lent 2008: "*Christ made Himself poor for you*" (2 Cor 8,9) - dated October 30 and released January 30, 2008 by the Vatican.

... May Mary, Mother and faithful Servant of the Lord, help believers to enter the "spiritual battle" of Lent,

armed with prayer, fasting and the practice of almsgiving, so as to arrive at the celebration of the Easter Feasts, renewed in spirit. With these wishes, I willingly impart to all my Apostolic Blessing.